

A Telemedical Council For Rheumatism For Primary Health Care

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INTRODUCTION

Rheumatology is an interdisciplinary field where health care delivery takes place in cooperation with orthopaedy, internal medicine, radiology, physical and social medicine.

Experts in rheumatology help to decrease the progression². Computerized internet-based consultation of experts by General Practitioners may as well improve health care delivery. Several new therapies depend on early diagnosis and therapy in the early stages of therapy. Adequate interdisciplinary therapy (drugs, patient information and education, physical medics) can stop or decelerate joint destruction.

THE MEDICAL DOMAIN

Internet based medical information systems are rather new in Germany but are increasing tremendously¹. The advantages of the Internet for an application in the field of medicine are in particular:

- Distance: The user normally does not notice the distance between the information server and his own computer.
- Presence: Telephone inquiries need the presence of both partners at the same time, whereby inquiries by Internet may be answered by demand.
- Speed: In opposition to the inquiries by mail, Internet inquiries are much faster. The required time period for the question transfer takes minutes rather than days.

THE TECHNICAL DOMAIN

The Internet Council can be accessed through its homepage (<http://www.med.uni-muenchen.de/rheuma>). It offers access for patients and physicians. Access is not restricted for patients whereas physicians are required to log in with user account and password.

A HTTP form is presented with a small number of fixed parameters. A large field for free text gives enough room for describing problem and question.

The contents of the form is recorded on the server for further evaluation and mailed to the experts of the university hospital. The reply of the medical experts is sent to the server where the reply is recorded and forwarded to the patient or physician.

All questions and their answers are recorded in a database. In regular intervals, the database's contents are edited and sent to the participating physicians as a package of vocational training.

EVALUATION

Within the framework of this project, it is above all planned to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of the telemedical council as a research instrument.

The data is recorded continuously and legible for the computer; that it can be evaluated directly with a statistics program in the fly. Up to now 12 physicians and 46 patients are participants of the system.

DISCUSSION

In rural areas, there is a deficit in the treatment of chronic diseases with new methods. In many cases, distances are too far to go see an adequate specialist. Physicians of primary care often do not have enough time to attend all vocational training courses offered or to get information from colleagues working in specialist hospitals.

As the medium of the future, the Internet will soon be available literally everywhere. For modern medicine, all this offers great advantages in optimizing patient care.

REFERENCES

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